

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 1: The Genealogy and Birth of Jesus -- Matthew 1:1-25

Most of us, if we are honest, are tempted to skip the first page of Matthew. A long list of names, most of them hard to pronounce, marching down the page like a phone book from a world that vanished thousands of years ago. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and on it goes. Our eyes glaze. Our finger reaches for the next page. But before you turn it, slow down. Matthew did not begin his Gospel this way by accident. He is not clearing his throat. He is making a claim so large that he needs forty-two generations to say it.

Read the list again and you begin to hear a heartbeat underneath it. From Abraham, the man who was promised that through his family the whole world would be blessed. To David, the shepherd king who was told that one of his sons would reign on a throne that would never end. Through the long, dark valley of exile, when it looked as though every promise had been buried in Babylon. And then, quietly, at the bottom of the page, a carpenter named Joseph, a young woman named Mary, and a baby. Matthew is telling us that every promise God ever made was traveling toward this moment.

What is most striking is who God let into the family tree. There is Tamar, who was wronged and desperate. There is Rahab, a prostitute from a pagan city. There is Ruth, a foreigner. There is the woman Matthew will not even name, calling her only the wife of Uriah, because the memory of David's great sin still aches. God did not airbrush His family portrait. He wrote redemption straight through the scandal, the failure, and the heartbreak of real people. If you have ever feared that your past is too tangled for God to use, look closely at the line that leads to Jesus.

And then the genealogy breaks open into wonder. A virgin conceives by the Holy Spirit. An angel tells a frightened Joseph not to be afraid. The child is to be named Jesus, the Lord saves, because He will save His people from their sins. And He will be called Immanuel, which means God with us. This is where our story begins too. Not with a list of rules, but with the staggering news that God did not stay at a safe distance. He came close. He came as one of us. He came to save.

Group Discussion: Matthew opens the New Testament with a genealogy that ties Jesus to Abraham, to David, and to the whole long story of Israel. Why do you think it matters so much that Jesus did not simply appear out of nowhere, but came as the fulfillment of promises God had been keeping for two thousand years?

Personal Reflection: Look at the names in this family line: the wronged, the outsider, the sinner, the broken. Where in your own story have you been tempted to believe that your past disqualifies you from being part of what God is doing? What would it mean to let God write redemption through your history rather than around it?

Read Matthew 1:1-25

Study Questions

1. Matthew's very first sentence calls Jesus "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1). What promises had God made to Abraham and to David, and what is Matthew claiming about Jesus by anchoring Him to both of those covenants?
2. The family line of Jesus is full of people with broken and even scandalous stories. When you read your own history honestly, where are you most tempted to believe that your past has disqualified you from being useful to God?
3. Matthew arranges the generations into three sets of fourteen, and he refuses to skip over the exile to Babylon (1:11, 17). What is he teaching us about how God works through long stretches of waiting, and even through judgment, to keep His promises?
4. Joseph is called "a righteous man" who first plans to protect Mary quietly and then obeys God at real cost to his own reputation (1:19, 24). Where is God asking you to choose obedience over how things will look to other people?
5. The angel says plainly that the child is conceived "from the Holy Spirit" and born of a virgin (1:18, 20, 23). Why is the virgin birth essential to who Jesus is, and what would be lost if it were not true?
6. The whole story turns on God breaking into ordinary lives: an engaged couple in a small, unremarkable town. Where have you stopped expecting God to show up in the ordinary details of your life, and what would change if you truly believed He is with you there?

7. Matthew says the child will be called “Immanuel,” which means “God with us” (1:23). What does it mean that in Jesus God Himself came to be with us, rather than simply sending help from a safe distance?
8. Both Mary and Joseph were handed a calling that others would misunderstand and gossip about. Who in your life needs you to trust God’s quiet work in them rather than the surface story, and how can you show that trust this week?
9. The angel says, “you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (1:21). What does this name reveal about the central problem Jesus came to solve, and how does the New Testament say a person actually comes to receive that salvation from sin?
10. Look back over the whole chapter, from the genealogy to the manger. Name one specific way Jesus, the promised Savior who is God with us, is reshaping the way you see your past, your obedience, or your hope this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Genesis 12:1–3, the promise that all nations would be blessed through Abraham’s offspring; 2 Samuel 7:12–16, God’s promise that David’s throne would be established forever; Isaiah 7:14, the sign of a virgin who would bear a son called Immanuel; Galatians 4:4–5, God sending His Son in the fullness of time to redeem us; Acts 2:36–38, the response of faith, repentance, and baptism to Jesus as Lord and Christ.